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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN GARDNER, 1818--1915.**An Early Physician of Illinois.**

By GEORGE W. BROCK, M. D.

Benjamin Franklin Gardner, son of Rodman and Mary (Worstell) Gardner, was born in Brown County, Ohio, June 22, 1818.

He was often heard to say that he was just as old as the State of Illinois, so it seems appropriate to publish this biographical sketch at this time, during the centennial observance of the State of his adoption.

His early ancestors came to America with Roger Williams. His grandfather, after whom he was named, was a soldier of the Revolution, and his father served in the War of 1812, a heritage of which any American might be proud.

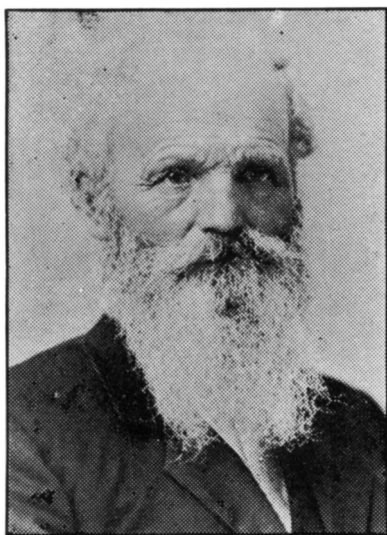
While a child his father died, and as he was the oldest son the duties of head of household fell on his young shoulders; but by unceasing energy and thrift he supported his mother and the younger children and also applied himself to gaining an education.

With such a handicap an education was difficult to obtain, as the sessions of school were short and these irregularly attended, as he was apprenticed to a blacksmith at an early age.

His lack of formal schooling was made up by reading, in which he even engaged during the intervals of working at the forge and anvil.

He removed from Brown County to Felicity, Clermont County, when a young man, where he began to assert his interest in community life by becoming a manager of the underground railroad and a first lieutenant in the Ohio state militia.

In the early forties he made a trip to Illinois, but returned to Ohio, where he followed his trade of blacksmith



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN GARDNER.

in the summer and in the winter piloted flatboats on the Mississippi River to New Orleans, or lectured on phrenology and abolition. On February 14, 1846, he married Mary Howser and gave up the flatboat trips, applying himself to his trade in season and lecturing during the winter. In 1851 he made another trip to Illinois, hiring a pony at Pekin, on which he viewed the fertile prairies of central Illinois.

He was so well pleased with the country that he moved his family, in company with his father-in-law and his family, to Illinois in the spring of 1852, arriving at the village of Waynesville. He was not satisfied there, so disposed of his horses and wagon and took a boat at Pekin for Alton, where he resumed his trade with his brother-in-law, Isaac Price.

All this time he had been reading books on medicine and during the next year removed to St. Louis, Mo., associating himself in the practice of medicine with his brother-in-law, Dr. Ripley, and a Dr. Child. They had a drug store and office on Main Street, an establishment typical of the time, in which the physician and druggist manufactured and compounded their pharmaceuticals from the crude drugs.

I wish to digress from the personal history of the young doctor to survey the field of higher intellectual training of his time and place.

The trans-Allegheny pioneers, who settled in the Mississippi Valley and along its tributary streams, produced sons full of bodily and mental strength, but life was rude and those possessing a higher education extremely few.

Born and reared in log cabins close to the natural resources of a country rich in animal and plant life, with every home more or less of a factory and shop in which the necessities of life must be manufactured, tended to stimulate initiative and independence. Men extemporized articles for their use, which served their purpose, where in older communities such things were made by a few skilled artisans.

In the wish to advance mentally the chance of taking up pure science or literature was impossible. Science was without teachers or colleges and the people were not a literary people.

If a higher training was to be obtained it must come through some practical branch of learning; something, too, by

which a man might earn his bread, as there was no class so well off financially that they might devote themselves to that from which no gain could be expected. So these ambitious young men athirst for learning turned to law, theology and medicine, a movement continuing to the present day, and giving the United States more professional men than any other nation.

In medicine the training, as with the other professions, was meager. After a short schooling in "readin, ritin and rithmetic" the lad might get a few lessons in Latin from some minister or the master of a private academy, supplementing his schooling by reading the common classics, the Bible, Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," Weem's "Life of Washington," etc.

Now they were ready to read medicine in the office of the leading practitioner of the village, where they remained for three or four years, reading and observing their preceptor's patients.

Dr. Gardner was establishing a practice in St. Louis that promised success when a neighbor, a slave owner, sold some of his own offspring into servitude to the southern plantations. This called forth such strong condemnation from the doctor that the Southerners were much aroused, and it became unsafe for his further residence there, so he returned to Waynesville, where he practiced his profession for thirteen years. Waynesville was a town of about 200 people. Most of the stores and a few dwellings were frame structures, but most of the townspeople lived in log cabins.

Being the main trading center of an area bounded by Bloomington, Danville, Springfield and Pekin, the limits of practice of the physicians were likewise bounded by the out-reaching contiguous territory ministered to by the physicians of those leading towns. This meant a radius of fifteen to twenty miles to be made on horseback the greater portion of the year, on account of the lack of bridges over the numerous streams and the absence and poorness of the roads. In summer and fall it was possible to use a gig, which was of crude manufacture. Some of the early physicians of Waynesville were Doctors Wheeler, Stewart, Whitmore, Knapp, Rankin, Harrison, Martin, Ross, Buckner, Scott, Smedley, Ingham, Hunt,

Barthlow, Tenney and Gardner. Dr. Winn also practiced in and about Waynesville and should be mentioned, although he lived four miles west of town at Shallow Ford on the banks of Kickapoo. Not much is known of these early practitioners, and I will refer briefly to only two of them, because of contrasting type and illustrating some peculiarities of early practice.

In the autumn of 1843 Rush Medical College of Chicago opened its doors to students. In selecting a faculty, not only the physicians of Chicago were drawn on, but also those of the surrounding towns. Dr. M. L. Knapp of Waynesville was selected as the professor of obstetrics and the diseases of women and children. In recognition of his ability as a practitioner in these branches among the medical men of the central West, he rode horseback to Chicago, delivered his course of lectures and then returned to resume his practice in Waynesville.

The other man, Dr. Winn, was a man of large and successful practice, but a hard drinking, hard riding man. On occasions he would ride into the country store and bar room on horseback and run things very much to suit himself. His fame was widespread as a healer of almost miraculous powers. Once when Isaac Funk was eighty miles on the road to Chicago with a drove of hogs he became ill and sent for Winn, who traveled by relay horses to his side and gave him relief, so that he proceeded on his way. This was the sort of professional man whom some preferred drunk to other men sober, a phrase that sounds strange at this day, when drunkenness in a professional man would not be tolerated.

When Dr. Gardner located in Waynesville the physicians were Doctors Ross, Hunt, Harrison, Tenney and Stewart. Not long after Dr. Gardner's location there the cholera broke out. Dr. Harrison early succumbed to the disease, dying with his boots on, and the other doctors fled the town, leaving the entire burden on Dr. Gardner, who labored day and night for weeks. Such service and devotion were so well appreciated by the survivors that for years afterwards his practice was so extensive that it took three riding horses to carry him in making his calls. He was at times so exhausted from the great extent of his professional labors that he was trans-

ported to see his patients, lying on a feather bed; as, for instance, to see Timothy Hoblit, who suffered from dropsy.

Recurring to the cholera in Waynesville, it started with the death of a Walker, who had driven hogs to St. Louis. Immediate interment was advised, but the advice was unheeded and a wake held, which helped much in spreading the contagion.

This man lived in a log cabin in the main street, and as his wife died soon after him, leaving six or seven children orphans, the doctor endeavored to get another place for them so the cabin could be burned, but as he failed in this, he took them into his own home, one of the many charitable acts performed by this self-sacrificing man. This was a time of great trial, as so many were ill and died and nurses were so few, owing to so many fleeing from the town, that many were unministered to either in life or death. New cemeteries were laid out, so that bodies might not be carried a distance, some becoming permanent, others in fields now neglected or forgotten.

Wishing to broaden and extend the practical knowledge gained in the office of his preceptor and in his own practice, he attended lectures and graduated from the Cincinnati Eclectic Medical Institute May 26, 1860.

Many of the physicians of an early day had no regular training in a medical college, and their right to practice their profession after the organization of a State Board of Health and the establishment of definite requirements were based on years of practice.

After the building of the Chicago & Alton Railroad and laying out of Atlanta, many moved from Waynesville to the railroad, among them being Dr. Gardner, his wife's relatives, the Howsers, and many others. Drs. Rankin and Stewart also moved from Waynesville to Atlanta, the latter serving in the Civil War, retiring with the rank of colonel. Dr. Gardner located in Atlanta in March, 1866, combining a drug store with his medical practice, in both of which he had an unusual measure of success.

He was a leading spirit in the social life of his community, a patron of higher education in his support of the early academy at Waynesville, and although not affiliated with

any church, a firm believer in the value and paramount importance of moral and ethical training. He was one of the organizers of the Republican party at both Waynesville and Atlanta and stumped DeWitt and Logan Counties during Lincoln's campaigns for President. He was in frequent conference with Governor Richard Yates in the secret service for the Union forces, being a member of the "Union League," and he was a delegate to the Bloomington convention appointed by Abraham Lincoln. He was a warm personal friend of Lincoln and related that "one spring day we were walking along the streets of Springfield and came upon some boys playing marbles. Lincoln joined them in their play, and admonished them that, as they were playing for keeps, that they should play honestly." Even in a game of chance he was always "Honest Abe." This was not the only emancipator that gave Dr. Gardner his friendship. During the first years of his residence in Atlanta he became the friend of Robert G. Ingersoll, that emancipator of free thought in regard to religion, a believer in a better future life, as expressed in the oration at his brother's grave, but a scoffer at the narrow dogma of the last century. Another friend was Barney Wood, a local artist who painted the portrait which has been donated to the historical collection at the Normal University.

Dr. Gardner was 87 years old at the time of his death, June 21, 1905. His activities in the latter years of his life were confined to his drug store, from which he was seldom absent. His wife, son Frank, a physician, and daughter Belle preceded him in death, leaving the following daughters to mourn his loss: Mrs. Carrie Beath and Mrs. Myrtle Safford of Chicago, Mrs. Emma Onstott, Mrs. Warnie Osborn and Mrs. Kate Goulding of St. Joseph, Michigan, and Mrs. Nettie Gill of Michiwanqua, Indiana.

Much of the material for this article was obtained from the obituary notice as prepared by his daughter, Mrs. Onstott, for publication in the *Atlanta Argus*. In the same issue his old friend, Ben Curry, says: "He was a brilliant and genial man, who rounded out a useful life. We knew him in the long ago, away back in the fifties, when as a doctor he had more to do than any physician we ever knew. His home in

those days was almost a sanitarium, and day and night, year in and out, the doctor knew no rest. Now the great rest that comes to us all has overtaken him, and we trust that he is happily mingling with his loved ones who had gone before."

He was a tall, handsome man, with a lofty brow, a flowing beard and eyes that were mellow with kindness and sympathy, yet piercing with the insight of a keen intellect guiding all that he thought or did. His favorite author was Burns—sage, yet sparkling with wit; like himself, of and for the common people and for their best interests.

He was of the best of the early physicians. He was not only physician, but friend and counsellor as well, and his friends cherish his memory as a precious thing.

"But gittin' back to docterin'—all the sick and in distress,
And old and pore, and weak and small, and lone and mother-
less—

I jes' tell you I 'preciate the man 'at's got the love
To 'go ye forth and ministrate!' as Scriptur' tells us of."